

PRINTERS

FAQ

Q I have an old printer with a parallel port only, but my new notebook doesn't have one. Do I have to buy a new printer?

A There are three ways you can avoid having to buy a new printer. It's possible to buy a simple and inexpensive USB-to-parallel converter that connects your printer directly to your notebook. Remember, though, that you'll still need your old parallel cable if the converter terminates in a female 25-pin parallel port, rather than a 36-pin IEEE 1284 Centronics connector.

If you have a home network and you're keeping your old PC, you can use Windows' print sharing to make the printer available to other networked computers. However, you'll need your PC to be on whenever you want to print, which is wasteful and inconvenient if you aren't using it for anything else. Alternatively, you could buy a parallel network print server – wireless and wired versions are available – which is a smaller and more convenient way to share your printer.

Simon Handby

Printers and audio expert

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EPSON PictureMate 240

★★★★★

£110 inc VAT



Epson has expanded the PictureMate range with the release of two new models. The PictureMate 240 reviewed here is a four-colour inkjet that can print from a computer or digital camera connected via USB or PictBridge USB, or directly from a range of common memory card types. The similar PictureMate 280 incorporates a DVD-ROM/CD-RW drive and costs around £170 including VAT.

Although the PictureMate 240 is brand new, it already looks quite dated. It's square-sided and seems tall for a compact photo printer, although it doesn't take up much desk space. A hinged lid that covers the entire top panel helps keep dust away from the screen and paper input when they aren't in use. This has a clear window that doesn't quite line up with the screen beneath it. We're not sure of the point of this, as the lid covers all the rubbery control buttons.

The PictureMate 240 takes a single consumable, which contains all four ink colours and slots into a compartment at the rear. It comes in two capacities, bundled either with 50 or 150 sheets of 6x4" photo paper, and should contain a suitable amount of ink to print on them all. The 240 arrives with a starter pack that contains enough ink and paper for 20 prints, which is generous compared to other compact photo printers. With 150-sheet PicturePacks available for less than £24, prints cost a competitive 15.5p each.

We've criticised the icon-only direct printing menus on certain Epson photo printers for being tricky to use, but the PictureMate 240's menu uses a clear combination of icons and text. It's much easier to follow and makes good use of the



240's large, clear screen. A dedicated Display button lets you switch between large previews of each shot, or a thumbnail view of six or 15 images at once. This makes it easy to pick out pictures from a full memory card, so it's ideal for reviewing and printing holiday snaps.

Unlike some compact photo printers we've reviewed, the PictureMate 240's output quality is high enough to do pictures justice. We were impressed with the printer's sharpness, which helped preserve fine details sometimes lost in prints from its dye-sublimation competitors. Photos printed from a memory card had a little fine grain, but appeared quickly, with six borderless 6x4" shots taking only four minutes and 31 seconds to print.

When you print from a PC, you can select Enhance

Fine Detail, which is the 240's highest quality setting. This is slower, but it produced excellent prints with no trace of grain or banding. All our test prints had a consistent gloss finish and reproduced colours accurately.

The PictureMate 240 isn't that cheap to buy, but its prints cost about the same as those from many online photo-printing services. If you want the convenience of a dedicated photo printer in the home, this is a great choice.

Simon Handby

SUMMARY

- ✓ Great photo quality
- ✓ Easy to use
- ✗ Unappealing design

COMPACT PHOTO INKJET Four-colour inkjet, 5,760x1,440dpi resolution, USB Hi-Speed and USB PictBridge interfaces
PART CODE C11C660004
SUPPLIER www.misco.co.uk
DETAILS www.epson.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)

Photo speed 0.6ppm

-50% Reference +50% +100%

Also consider...

SAMSUNG ML-2510

★★★★★

£75 inc VAT



This grey laser printer may look a little drab, but it's easy to set up and quick to install. It has a 250-sheet covered input tray and a single-sheet multipurpose feed slot, but it crumples envelopes.

The ML-2510 peaked at 22.7ppm when printing text, which is very impressive for such an affordable printer. It's also inexpensive to run, with a cost per page of around 1.5p, yet produces high-quality text and mono graphics. It's a great compact budget mono laser.



MONO LASER PRINTER 1,200x600dpi resolution, 24ppm maximum speed, parallel and USB Hi-Speed interfaces PART CODE ML-2510
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com DETAILS www.samsung.co.uk

✓ Fast, affordable to buy and run ✓ Good print quality
FULL REVIEW Oct 2006

DELL Multifunction Laser Printer 1815dn

★★★★★

£287 inc VAT



Dell's Multifunction Laser Printer 1815dn can scan in colour and make black-and-white prints and copies. It has a standard network interface

and can print on both sides of a sheet of paper automatically. It produces sharp scans, high-quality text documents and decent copies, though they can be a little too dark. It's fast, easy to use and cheap to run, so it's ideal for a busy office.



MONO LASER MULTIFUNCTION PERIPHERAL 600x600dpi print resolution, 600x1,200dpi scan resolution, USB and 10/100 Ethernet interfaces SUPPLIER Dell 0879 075818 DETAILS www.dell.co.uk

✓ Fast, cheap to run ✓ Dark PostScript prints FULL REVIEW Nov 2006

DELL

Multifunction Colour Laser Printer 3115cn

★★★★★

£637 inc VAT

Dell's printer-naming policy should leave you in little doubt about what the Multifunction Colour Laser Printer 3115cn does. It's based on a fast, single-pass colour laser print engine that can produce up to 30 monochrome pages per minute, or 17 in colour. You can't fail to notice the 3115cn's integrated scanner and automatic document feeder, which projects up from the device's main body.

The 3115cn is particularly tall, deep and heavy. If you're easily annoyed by warning beeps, you might want to wear ear plugs while setting it up. Almost every conceivable action or status event causes a beep or two, including maddeningly persistent warnings while you load paper into the fully enclosed input tray. We spent ages navigating through the menu turning off no fewer than 11 warnings before discovering an option at the end of the list that disabled all tones.

Before the 3115cn is ready for use, you need to unlock its scanner's head, remove some packaging and insert four toner cartridges. These are a little tricky to handle and fit the other way round than you might expect. We managed to get a small amount of toner on our hands in the process.

Dell's setup program couldn't detect the printer on our labs network, but we were able to print a setup

page confirming the IP address that it had leased from our router. Supplied with this, the installer finished without a hitch.

Dell's installer lets administrators limit access to colour printing, which is more expensive than mono printing. You can choose to install a mono-only driver, or specify a password that must be supplied before colour jobs are permitted. The printer supports PCL and PostScript print languages. You can install drivers for both without having to re-run the setup program.

In common with most network-capable printers, the 3115cn has a web-based configuration interface. If you want to scan over the network, you'll need to use this to define and configure each target computer. We found it hard to configure successfully and were only able to test the 3115cn's scanner over a USB

connection. It performed quickly up to its maximum 600 dots per inch resolution, completing previews in just seven seconds.

Captured images were better than we'd expect from an office-oriented scanner, with faithful colours and well-preserved detail in very light and dark areas. They were acceptably sharp, but scans of office documents seemed a shade too light.

This is one of the fastest copiers we've tested, with a single mono page taking just under 10 seconds and a



colour page taking 18.5 seconds. Using the ADF to make a mono copy of a 10-page document took just 39.5 seconds. Mono results were accurately exposed and clear, but colour pages took on a blue cast and were not as well focused.

We completed our print tests using both the PCL and PostScript drivers. Simple text documents printed marginally quicker using PostScript, while colour jobs such as our photo tests and colour Normal speed test were faster using PCL. The 3115cn produced excellent, crisp black text using either driver. Using the PCL driver, colour jobs appeared a bit dull. Colour accuracy was improved with the PostScript driver, but light regions of our photo tests suffered from a loss of detail.

The 3115cn scans high-quality images, but capturing them over the network isn't as straightforward as we'd like. Though it's impressively quick, particularly when printing mono documents, its colour print quality is a little disappointing. This is a great choice if low running costs are essential, but Epson's AcuLaser CX11NF produces better-quality results.

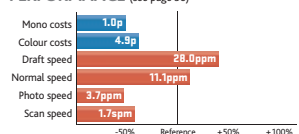
Simon Handby

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast prints, scans and copies
- ✓ Low running costs
- ✗ Unexceptional print quality

COLOUR LASER MULTIFUNCTION PERIPHERAL 600x600dpi print resolution, 600x600dpi scan resolution, USB Hi-Speed, parallel and 10/100 Ethernet interfaces
SUPPLIER Dell 08709 075818
DETAILS www.dell.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)

EPSON
AcuLaser C1100

★★★★★

£256 inc VAT

Epson's C1100 is reasonably large for a four-pass colour laser, and it's more tricky than many to set up. In our tests it came commendably close to Epson's claimed speeds, but the most welcome discovery was its superb all-round print quality.

This is an excellent, inexpensive printer with reasonable running costs.



COLOUR LASER PRINTER Colour laser, 600dpi, 25ppm mono/5ppm colour maximum speed, USB Hi-Speed interface
PART CODE C11C567001 **SUPPLIER** www.misco.co.uk
DETAILS www.epson.co.uk ✓ Excellent print quality
 ✗ Fiddly to set up **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2005

CANON
PIXMA iP4300

★★★★★

£56 inc VAT

If you need a budget printer, Canon's PIXMA iP4300 shows that you don't need to compromise on quality. It has two paper trays, and can print on coated CDs or both sides of each sheet of paper. It's fast to produce text, colour graphics and photos. Print quality is high, with no trace of grain, though photos are a little bit oversaturated. Best of all, it has very low running costs.



INKJET PRINTER Five-colour inkjet, 9,600x2,400dpi maximum resolution, USB and PictBridge USB interfaces
PART CODE 1438B008AA **SUPPLIER** www.savastore.com
DETAILS www.canon.co.uk ✓ Inexpensive, fast, flexible
 ✓ Stylish, high-quality results **FULL REVIEW** Dec 2006

CANON
PIXMA MP160

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT

The PIXMA MP160 costs less than many budget inkjet printers, and it can also make good-quality scans and copies. It's compact and attractive and not too tricky to set up. Unusually for such an affordable printer, it has low running costs if you use Canon's high-capacity ink cartridges. It's great value if you just want a basic multifunction peripheral.



FOUR-COLOUR INKJET MFP 4,800x1,200dpi print resolution, 600x1,200dpi scan resolution, USB Hi-Speed and PictBridge USB interfaces **PART CODE** 1447B008AA
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com **DETAILS** www.canon.co.uk
 ✓ Affordable, with good results ✗ No card reader
FULL REVIEW Jan 2007